Theatrical-1927

Individual Troupes, etc.

Says Ethel Waters' Appeal Is More Than Just Racial

AFRO Reporter Discovers Soul Of Star In Interview, Artist Of Pennsylvania Dutch And Guiana Parentage

By EVA A. JESSYE

NEW YORK—In reply to my ring a small black woman of pleasing contenance and good looks invited me in, showing me into the living room where I was to wait until my presence was announced to the toast of Broadway, Ethel Waters. An immense Airdale, having followed me from the door, stood for a moment in critical observation, then sauntered across the room and deposited himself in my alto-gether too sufficient lap. From the reputably "highhat" Airdale a welcome indeed!

"Oh yes, Come in, honey." It was Miss Waters speaking. I had immediate visions of gorgeous draperies, ravishing negligees and quicksand rugs. I was utterly unprepared for the rigid simplicity which met my gaze. The lady of the hour was propped up in bed for her usual afternoon relaxation, the room as unpretentious and devoid of luxuries as my own which is saying a lot. A few inspirational pictures decorated the walls and close beside the bed a framed Mother poem. "Sit down, if you are not superstitious. ....on the bed". Then in reply to a multitude of questions came the story of her childhood.... ambitions.. ..struggles.. ..unnoticed years, then the consequent rise to fame.

No, kind friend, she is not from the South. Born in Pennsylvania, if you please or not....her father of Pennsylvania Dutch extraction, and her mother from the Guianas. Her first stage experience came with the production of and starring in dramas staged in her cellar when she had outdistanced diapers only by a few years. Her grandmother objected to her interest in theatricals, and against the wishes of her family she made her professional debut at the age of 18, Her cabaret days are well known. Rudolph Fisher in the current American Mercury devotes a half page to her former connection with Edmonds on Fifth Ave.

These days are remembered with profound regret by Miss Waters, not that she is ashamed of her lowly beginning, but the Negro public, self-righteous and unwilling to understand that a performer must deliver what that same public demands, sat in unfair judgment. "Why," asks Miss Waters, "is a blues singer thought to be expressing her real self in her songs any more than any other actor in any other part?" Now you get her point of view exactly.

WORK SPONTANEOUS

One charming thing about he comedy is its refreshing spontaneity It is as free and unforced as the laughter of a babe....unaffected and genuine. "I never know exactly what I am going to do," declared Ethel. It seems to do itself and never two times the same." According to her own words she is extremely moody, sometimes very good, sometimes good and rotten! She has never learned to conceal her anger or cloak it with smiling deceit....it must come out in the open. Never without stage fright ....unable to be properly awed in the presence of celebrities. When personally complimented by Otto Kahn, white, who remained thru the entire opening performance she smiled in childish delight and thanked him with the utmost artlesness.

HUMAN APPEAL

Most artists are ambitious, most of them for fame and wealth . . . not Ethel. Of all things she desires to rise in the world so that she may prove that one need not change their identity with the altitude. Of all things most abhorrent to this advocate of the "Be Yourself" cult is the fellow who gets up in the air because a few hands have applauded his efforts.

Patrons of the theatre are under the delusion that it is the Negro of Miss Water's interpretations that is so appealing. It is not. It is the real, close human nature of the artist herself that reaches out and establishes a comradeship the moment she would enjoy her work just as thoroly. appears on the stage. One who has never seen a Negro would enjoy her work just as thoroughly. Her art is not racial and should not so narrowly be confined....it reaches as far as human emotions....a universal relationship.

It is difficult to describe her personality....devilish, charming, defiant, nonchalant, clever and unadulterably "Ethel." Better looking off stage than on. Now you who have raved over her footlight loveliness, just imagine. Her looks will bear the most minute inspection. Harriet Underhill in the Herald-Tribune, of recent date devoted two columns to the discussion of Miss Waters and classed her as one of the most attractive women on the stage today. In the description of her eyes, form, hair, carriage, complexion and and general appearance her list of adjectives was surely exhausted.

NOT AFRAID OF WORK

Believe me, said the lady called Ethel, I can word too. . . I am a real waitress if anybody should ask you; and I can make a good living at that Then, as if divulging a ponderous secret, "I can cook, yes indeed, make a decent biscuit and the best hot rolls." I must have begun to look weak by that time for she soon brought the enjoyable interview to an end.

She escorted me to the door and in passing the kitchen said, "I want you to meet my mother." To my great surprise it was none other than the lady of the good looks who had let me in. One can scarcely believe her old enough to have a daughter so large and famous. She is the soul of dignity and was much embarrassed when the irrepressible daughter, brushing her hand across her mother's head said, "Speaking of hair just look, Now why on earth didn't I get it?" Her regret is justified for the mother's hair could be the most successful advertisement for Satintop, as black and glossy as patent leather.

PRAISES HUSBAND

Miss Waters was loud in the praise of Earl Dancer her husband and manager. It is he who encourages the temperamental star and urges her to more triumphs. He is cool, methodical and shrewd....never overreaching himself.... in business. Miss Waters is alert and greatly interested in all questions pertaining to the Race.... she is wideawake and carries a lot of brain beneath that boyish bob. One question she desires answered is this....Why do Negroes stand back and never give a thought to helping a struggling young artist.... never pay him the least attention even go so far as to turn their back on him completely until some white person recognizes the gifted one and extol his art. Then they will come running to make a great to do over "OUR" star. Well, Miss Waters, every Negro who has gotten anywhere wants to know that same thing. It's beyond me. But I do know this, that the art of Ethel Waters will place her far above such plays as "Africana." She is real high class musical comedy material regardless to race and the sooner that is realized the sooner will she arrive at her rightful place.

Twins Make Hit With Famous Duncan Sisters

LOS ANGELES, CAL., (ANP.) — Two little four-year-old twins, the daughters of Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Bilbrow, just completed a six weeks engagement at the famous Egyptian Theatre in Hollywood in the prologue of the 'Duncan Sisters' "Topsy and Eva" picture which just completed its run there.

The children have wonderful voices and prophecy is being made that they will be as great a sensation as the Duncan Sisters, themselves.

Says Ethel Waters Is Most Dignified Disher Of Dirt

Baltimorean Reviews "Africana" From The "Gallery Guards'" Point Of View

NEW YORK. — Harry Bragg, former Baltimorean, sees Ethel Waters as a skillful handler of obscene themes in her appearance in "Africana", Earl Dancer's revue which is beginning its fifth week at Daly's.

The writer is the son of Dr. Bragg, historian and rector of St. James P.E. Church. He is a clerk in the department of state's offices in New York. Mr. Bragg says:

"In by-gone years the merits of a performance were largely made manifest by the gentry who occupied the unreserved section nearest the roof. In more recent years the sentiments of the gallery guards have ceased to be an element in the destiny of a show, being duly superseded by the reviewer, whose critique is drawn from an analysis more or less scientifically made. It is in the apologetic tone of a gallery guard that I venture a few homely comments on the revue. "Africana", which I so thoroughly enjoyed.

"Musically, there is hardly a number which still lingers with me, yet the orchestral and choral work were resplendent with harmony. The audience suffered a severe disappointment when the 'Africana Eight' was not permitted to render more than two numbers. A sneaking feeling had just settled over the customers that the boys were now about to put on their "best works", probably some more close harmony without the aid of orchestration. Though they were vociferously received there was no further chording.

"Some of the best dancing to which the theatre-going public has ever been exposed was served up in Miss Waters' revue and in this, Baby and Bobby Goins excelled all others. In spite of this clever performance Riley and Wilkins with their "Step a Second" speeded the show up to a place where the going was made hard even for the Goins.

"Glenn and Jenkins, as is their usual custom, 'swept a nasty depot' to the satisfaction of those present.

"Of course, the fore-going only indicates the calibre of the support which surrounded that artistic personality, Ethel Waters, who from start to finish dominates the revue and reaches the high-water mark of the evening when she "sums up" in the second act with 'Some Songs You Have On Your Records'. It has been said that these songs are too replete with the ribald and thee slapstick, and that one needs shock-absorbers when she sallys forth.

"It must be conceded, however that Miss Waters can "dish the dirt" with more dignity and grace than any artist who has strolled behind the footlights to entertain, and the sophistries which she chants are as equally compelling. When she sings "Take Your Black Bottom Outside" it is with mien of Lord or Lady that she commands her erstwhile boy friend to remove his dark anatomy beyond the portals. How dramatic she becomes, as she sings 'Take It Where You Had It Last Night.'

"The wayward consort has returned home to find his entry barred and his former mistress red-headed with anger. He insisted that he be permitted to enter; then it is that this female of the species pulls herself up to her full height, rares back akimbo, and with a finality that brooks no further appeal, sings like an emotional opera star, "I'll Call the Law". The transition is complete as she croons with ecstacy mingled with defiance — 'Charley is elected now I don't want you no more.'

"In so much of her repertoire alone, as Miss Waters presents each evening, the customers get the full weight of their money. Really the lady has no duplicate in the way she can gyrate, and the things she can articulate; there is nothing you can anticipate; but she certainly does stimulate and well nigh fascinate you right on out of this world."

RUMOR JOSIE BAKER TO SUE ETHEL WATERS

NEW YORK CITY—Broadway as well as Harlem is astir over the rumor that Josephine Baker, through her New York attorneys, has instituted suit for an injunction to prevent Ethel Waters from continuing her burlesque of the Parisian "countess." Whether the producer, Earl Dancer, who conceived the idea, and the owners of Daly's 63rd Street Theatre, where the alleged injury to Josephine's popularity takes place, will be co-defendants, could not be ascertained.

There was also much speculation as to whether Count Albertini would institute a similar injunction against Louis Douglas, who at every performance convulses New York's Rialto with his mimicry of Miss Baker's consort.

An interview with Miss Waters disclosed the fact that she was all in the dark as to the proceedings and had not, and did not expect to be served in the action. If Miss Baker has grounds for civil action no legal lights could be found who were of that opinion. This is the same opinion expressed by those who have seen the skit over and over again in "Africana" and it was the consensus of desire that if such action were taken it would come to naught, since this timely burlesque of the famous Josephine certainly does not detract from the much sought after publicity of the "countess."

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Muse's "Miss Bandana" Scores At The Lafayette

Overcoming the handicaps thrown in his way by the violent rainstorm on Monday afternoon, Clarence E. Muse's "Miss Bandana" scored a decided hit at the Lafayette Theatre where it is booked for this week's engagement.

"Miss Bandana," while departing somewhat from the revue type in that a well-told story runs through the playlet, is nevertheless, a revue. But it boasts of one of the finest casts which has ever appeared in a colored revue and is replete with splendid dances, tuneful melodies and rollicking comedy. There is also a scenic effect which would do credit to Broadway.

The opening scene is laid on a Mississippi levee, where romance starts between a stage-struck country girl and her youthful admirer. The story follows her adventures in the Mississippi valley and in New York. The cast includes the following: Clarence E. Muse, S. T. Whitney R. M. Cooper, George Backer, L. Randall, J Mobley, Onion Jeffries, Walter Crumbley, Mable C. Ridley, Ike Paul Alice Gorgas, Geraldine Gooding, Olie Burgoyne, John Henderson, Cecil Graham, Gordon Wilson, and Hope Black. The well-known and extremely popular Three Brownies are also in the cast.

The music was provided by an orchestra under the leadership of Russell Smith.

The feature photoplay for the first part of the week is "Outlaws of Red River" starring Tom Mix. Beginning Thursday, the film feature will be "Modern Daughters" with Edna Murphy and Bryant Washburn.

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Brothers Rounding Out Quarter Century On Stage Together

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The two brothers, who have rounded out a quarter century of work together, ranging from concert tours, and parts in S. H. Dudley's companies to their own productions, will present two other musical shows during the season. "Children of the Sun" will be revived and the pair will also produce "Nut Brown Gal."

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The rumor circulating in Harlem to the effect that the famous actor Charles Gilpin had become insane was found, after careful investigation, to be without any foundation whatever. It is believed that the rumor was started maliciously in an effort to impair the actor's reputation.

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Florence Cameron, 133 West 131st street, with whom Gilpin has made his home for several years, expressed candid surprise upon hearing the rumor and declared that she had observed no change in Gilpin at any time, other than his frequent periods of physical illness, for which she expressed much sympathy.

A reporter talked with the creator of the role of "Emperor Jones" for more than an hour his rooms.

BLACKFACE SKITS IN GLEE CLUB HIT

Classics and Jazz Also on Menu at Woman's College Tonight

Negro spirituals, skits and blackface comedy and songs and hits will be included in the programs of the Emory Glee club, which will appear in the auditorium of the Woman's College Thursday night at 8 o'clock.

The first part of the program will include classical songs entirely, to the exclusion of any light stuff. Some of the songs to be used by the Glee club are: "The Shepardess," by the MacMurrough Glee club, "The Keys of Heaven," by Button, and "Dauletus," by Huhn, which will be sung by George Rogers.

George Rogers, of Brooksville, Fla., is considered one of the best baritones at Emory, and has done excellent work for the club since he became a student at the college. An original act to be staged by Chess Pagonarsino, who is a veteran member of the club, which is expected to be one of the best that was ever staged in a local auditorium.

"Countess" Josephine and "Flo" Mills Rival White Actors, Claim

In view of the almost phenomenal rise of the charming American actress, Josephine Baker, from an insignificant "extra girl" to the Darling of Paris" and to the toast of the Montmarte, and the rapid ascent to fame of the clever, alluring Florence Mills to the talk of London, a white "special" writer has commented on these two stories of accomplishment. The great success of these two girls has been the talk of theatrical circles for the past few months. Miss Baker's glowing career was particularly noticed when it was reported that she had married a Roman count.

Realizing the significance of the great achievement of these two colored girls in foreign lands, Milton Bronner, Special Writer for The Press, contributes the following article from London:

Actresses and musicians and dancers and cabaret girls and novelists and poets have come here from America and often they have been favorably received by the general public of London and Paris. But if the truth must be told the triumphs of John Barrymore, Jane Cowl, Doris Keane, Paul Whiteman and all the rest pale into insignificance before the knockout of two colored girls—Florence Mills and Josephine Baker.

The lithe Josephine came to Paris almost unheralded. She first appeared at the swell Champs Elysees theater in a show called simply "Revue Negre"—Negro Review. It was a singing and dancing show, such as we have been familiar with for donkey's years. But soon all the Parisian cognoscenti were flocking to the house. And then suddenly the show disappeared from the swell Etoile district. The reason was not a failure. It was a success.

The Folies Bergeres claimed Josephine at a huge salary. She's been packing the house ever since. Her form has been done by French sculptors. Her face has been painted by French artists. She has opened a cabaret of her own. Her vogue goes on undiminished.

Something of the same sort happened with Florence Mills. She, too, came unheralded. London was simply informed that she was to appear in a Negro review called "Blackbirds." It caught on at once, largely due to Florence. The show is now in its third edition and promises to run on all through the summer and on and on indefinitely. The Prince of Wales has been to see the performance over and over again. Society has followed in his wake.

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Hopkins is writing the score and Ollie McPherson, recognized star; "Shakey" Beasley, former- of the "Three Eddies"; Vivian ng. The former's eight piece band, Brown, soprano, and Kitty Aub- which played to Parisian audiences anche. The comedians have not for 18 months and is now appearing been selected.

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Among the outstanding artists of the new production are Mary Clem-

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NEW YORK REVIEWERS GIVE OPINIONS OF ETHEL WATERS AND AFRICANA

(New York Age)

Ethel Waters' "Africana" revue, which played a week at the Lafayette Theatre recently, opened at Daly's 63rd Street Theatre, Monday evening, July 11th. The show followed the conventional pattern of all Negro revues and except for the singing of Miss Waters and the acrobatic work of Baby and Bobby Goins did not offer any unusual entertainment.

Miss Waters, although not in the best voice on the opening night, did not fail to please the large audience with her singing. She was forced to sing two additional numbers following her specialty act in the second part of the show. She also threw the house into fits of laughter with her burlesque on Josephine Baker and her Italian Count.

"Africana" can boast of a well trained chorus which has plenty of pep but which runs somewhat to extremes in some of their costumes. The dancing generally was very good, especially the dances by Reily and Wilkins.

An added feature of the revue was the dancing of an old fashion cake walk by Miss Waters and "Pickaninny" Hill, brother of the late J. Leubrie Hill. They were assisted by a beautifully costumed group of girls and boys of the chorus.

The weak spots of the revue seem to be the lack of new songs and the need for new jokes and comedy situations. Some of the jokes that Billy Mills and Ed Pugh got off during the evening have been heard in Harlem for the past ten years.

Nevertheless, the white people in the audience, (more than half of those present) seemed very much pleased with the entire performance and indications are that "Africana" will enjoy a bigger success than any Negro show presented on Broadway in the past year.

(Amsterdam News)

Amid a literal riot of barbaric and primitive splendor, the much heralded "Africana," a musical revue, with Miss Ethel Waters leading, opened at the Daly's Theatre, West sixty-third street, west of Eighth avenue, on Monday night. The revue presents eleven scenes, which were all played around Miss Waters.

The revue might have been called "From Harlem to Broadway," for the reason that most of the scenes have been taken, with little modifications, from some of the well-known revues presented to Harlem audiences within the recent past. For this reason, "Africana" possesses one of the most brilliant array of stars ever seen in the cast of sundown revue.

Not since the days when Lubrie Hill presented Alice Ramsey and Evon Robinson in that never-to-be-forgotten revue or rather musical comedy, "My Friend From Kentucky," has there been presented to the New York stage such a splendid chorus. For individual stars and peppy chorus girls working in splendid jazzy harmony "Africana" is a triumph, but much of this was lost owing to the poor and to say the least immature judgment used in constructing the revue.

The number of genuine musical comedy stars, which passed in revue during the eleven scenes, created a riot of laughter and afforded sustained enjoyment, which called forth round after round of applause. Some of the stars now shining in this revue are the following: Ed. Pugh, Mike Riley, Paul Bass, Billy Mills, Henry Winifred, Margaret Beckett, Al Wilkins, Baby and Bobby Goins.

The hardest workers and at the same time the most attractive dancing of the entire revue was afforded by Bobby and Baby Goins, whose clever acrobatic and stunt dancing dominated the entire eleven scenes of the revue. Miss Margaret Beckett displayed rare dancing in the jazz leadership of the Ten Little Banana Girls and in her character of Sadie Goabout. The Taskiana Four were delicious in ministrel song harmony, and received deserved applause. The dance of the tambourines was well presented by the Africana Girls, and should have been made to end the revue before the intermission curtain. Their work was certainly an outstanding feature of the revue.

The chief defect in the revue was the poor direction which permitted such an out-of-the-way number as the cakewalk, led by Mr. Pickaninny Hill. Up to this number the revue had taken the house by storm and had earned its right to stay on Broadway; but after the cakewalk the tempo began to lag, and was only rescued from the doldrums by some splendid dancing and almost perfect team work by the chorus. Miss Waters is ably directed. She suffers the disadvantage of being dominated by her chorus, instead of her dominating it. She worked hard and rendered her songs with perfect smoothness and elegance, but her director surrounded her with an array of costumes worn by her chorus girls which left her limp before the frenzifu action of her chorus.

Ethel Waters has never worked harder in her life and at the same time shown to worse advantage. This situation must be blamed both upon her director and upon those who selected her costumes. Her song hits 'Dinah" and "Shake That Thing," lifted her for a while above the splendor of her chorus but following that she was again subdued by the next scene when her chorus again triumphed.

Miss Water's lampoon of Josephin Baker and her countless count was clever and artistically put over and her last song about her man gave he another breathing spell in which to shine; but the closing ensembl when she was again surrounded by her entire chorus and the work of such outstanding stars all lumped together placed her at a decided theatrical and scenic disavantage at the final fall of the curtain. Harlem should be proud of the work of the stars in "Africana."

Florence Mills Again Tells Europe About the Race Problem in the U. S.

Her Dreams of Equality—The Curse of Being Black—Denies Slanderous Stories—Cries Out for Justice for Her Race—Feels Visit Has Done Great Good.

By HANNEN SWAFFER.

(This article was written originally for the London, England, Daily Express shortly before the close of "Blackbirds.")

IN a few days Florence Mills and the "Blackbirds" company will leave London on a seven weeks' tour. They will see the English provinces for the first time, and take with them, first to Blackpool, the wonderful dance show which has been running in London for nine months.

Before "Dover-street to Dixie" and "The Rainbow" were produced in London it was opposed, the introduction of these colored companies to the West End, fearing that their success would be followed by a wholesale invasion of black people.

"The Rainbow" failed, calamitously. "Dover-street to Dixie" ran for only twelve weeks.

Now, although "Blackbirds" has lasted for nine months, the Variety Artists' Federation intend opposing the granting of labor permits to any other colored company. So that, I suppose, is the end of them. Yet there have been few complaints—although rumors have spread.

The Colored Star.

For nine months now, Florence Mills has been almost London's brightest star. If she were white she would be hailed, probably, as the greatest revue artist of her generation. Almost on the eve of her departure from London, I had a talk with her about problems that confront her every day.

It must be a terrible thing to be a great artist and yet to bear always upon your skin the color of a subject race.

The Plea in a Cabaret.

Florence Mills, it seems, dreams of the future of her people. One of her grandfathers was a white man. Otherwise—she is what is called a quadroon—she is entirely black.

When feted, not long ago, in the Piccadilly cabaret, she burst out suddenly, into a passionate plea for colored people. No one wrote it down. She has forgotten now what she said, but her eloquent plea for tolerance made an impression on many minds.

"I want to help the colored people," she told me. "I realize that in my line of work, I am doing much to help them. The stage is the quickest way to get to the people. My own success makes people think better of other colored folks."

The People Who Help.

"I must say that I have found in London nothing but kindness and friendliness," she said. "I have met lots of wonderful people, willing to help us in our great struggle. We have been given a chance to prove our worthiness, and to feel that we are free."

She told me how Lady Cook had arranged that friends of hers should meet the colored artists in her home, so that white and black people should understand each other better. Miss Ovington, a white woman, is the president of the National Association of Colored People in America. She, too, was doing that sort of work in the United States on a very large scale. "She is a great friend of mine," said Miss Mills.

The Park Avenue Lie.

Many rumors have spread about Florence Mills—how, when she became successful in New York, a few years ago, she bought a swagger apartment on Park avenue, to flaunt her color in the middle of rich white people.

"I did not live in Park avenue," said Miss Mills. "I have no idea why the rumor spread. I have heard it said I lived there for spite. I should find it rather an expensive way of being spiteful, spending $8,000, or even $10,000, a year on an apartment merely to spite somebody.

"Besides, I love being with my own people. I feel at home among them. We do not seek white people's society, and we are a very happy family, althoough a large one.

"In America we have our own restaurants and cabarets and theatres, and your people come to see our shows. The white people say 'Let's go slumming.' They seek us out."

The Future of Color.

Then Miss Mills told me of her dream.

"My greatest ambition in life is to see the white people ignore the colored question," she said. "This depends entirely upon ourselves. For ten years now the colored question has not been so acute. White people realize that the colored people are educated and more progressive. Conditions are bet-

er.

"Yet, even today, there are many colored boys in America who, after being trained as lawyers and doctors, have to become train attendants because they are black and there is no place for them.'

Paul Robeson and Roland Hayes both talented men of color, have told me the same story.

Genius With Color.

Florence Mills very much likes to read the books of Pushkin and Dumas, who had colored blood in them. She loves the music of Coleridge-Taylor, she says, because he was black.

"Yet it is ridiculous to think that we are different from white people," she went on, "because we are educated as you. After all, it is white authors whose books we read, and it is a white culture that surrounds us.

"Yet if we voice our opinion we are downed. Sometimes I have started to argue, and then heard: 'What right have you to talk? You are black.'

"It is a little hard on us. In the South, colored mammies bring white babies up and actually feed them at their own breasts. Yet, when the same mammy has her own little black baby, the mother of the white baby does not allow her youngster to play with the Negro child.

"If a white person in a theatre is put next to a Negro, the white person objects. Yet the same white person will eat food cooked by a colored person and be waited on by another Negro.

The Lesson of 1927.

"I feel our visit here has done a lot of good. No one has complained about us. Some people have been to see our show, not only two or three times, but twenty or thirty times. This must surely have helped.

"No, I have never felt that I have been slighted once in England. When I am out and people recognize me, saying 'Oh, there's Florence Mills,' they come over and introduce themselves and congratulate me.

"When I was at Ascot last week I walked through the paddock, just like the white people, and no one objected. At the Derby, two weeks before, I had most wonderful receptions wherever I went. In the streets even the children smile at me and 'Hello' as I walk along."

Yet her grandfather on her mother's side was a freed slave, while her husband, U. S. Thompson, is as black as she is. One of his grandfathers, too, was white—just like his wife's.

Ethel Waters Triumphs In "Africana," Miller-Lyles Show Fails To Impress

"Rang Tang" Rivals Ziegfeld Production In Costumes and Scenery; "Africana" Put Over By Superb Acting

NEW YORK, July 21.—"Africana," which opened last Monday at Daly's Sixty-third Street theater, was the second of the four shows scheduled for Broadway. It is far above "Bottomland" as a mountain peak. Of course, first, last and in the middle is Ethel Waters, on whom the critics exhausted all their terms of praise and admiration. And justly. She is the comedienne. She possesses all the qualities that go to make up a great star-magnetic personality, an intrigueing voice, perfect coordination of legs, arms and eyes, a million dollar smile, a pleasing length of body, and that basic humor that is the birthright of the Negro. To this she has added a willingness to work and a desire to please her audience, and she goes over with a bang. She completely doinates the production. It is her show.

Geraldyn Dismond

Second to Miss Waters on the bill—and in his own way equally as splendid, is Louis Douglas. When he appears on the stage one is immediately transported to distant shores. His mannerism, style of dancing and make-up are of the European music halls and safes. He is the complete antithesis of Miss Waters. She is distinctly racial! He is absolutely foreign. And when they work together in a satirical scene as the Countess Josephine and her Count, we have a marvelous example of two distinct heights to which colored performers can rise. Mr. Douglas is a real artist and has sense of humor tinged with pathos that is most appealing. He is a brown Charley Chaplin.

"Africana" is strictly a revue. Nor is it elaborate. The costumes are smart, but simple, in in keeping with the general tone. The same is true of the settings. Only the most necessary things have been used. There is no effort to distract your mind from the ability of the performers by cluttering the stage with props or clothes. If it goes, it will make it on its merit, not on its trimmings. As for the chorus, it is the best looking I have seen lately, and as one reporter put it "it knows its bunions." Of course there is the usual excellent hoofing that is the mark of Negro shows.

But in spite of Ethel Waters, Louis Douglas, a red hot chorus and some music by Donald Heywood that touches the spot—"Africana" is not without its weak points. The final of the first half to my mind lacks Ethel Waters, and the second half needs more comedy. The first act has a tremendously funny sketch—'Jedment Day," in which dark justice is meted out in Catch Air, Miss. but there is a shortage of laughs for the close, and the addition of a little clowning in the cabaret scene would be an improvement.

However, the faults that are "Africana's" can be remedied by a touch here and there. The important thing is that it is fundamentally good, and has Ethel Waters.

The next night "Rang Tang," an elaborate Jim Town-Africa-Harlem affair that was written by Kaj Gynt, a Swedish lady, and wished on Miller and Lyle, opened at the Royale. Why Miller and Lyle would be burdened with it all, I can't see. To me they are amusing and although all the old stuff with the safe, figuring, and boxing is again used, I still laughed right on. And they have added a new comic situation—where they are marooned on a disabled plane near the shores of Africa—which is truly entertaining. But for the rest of the company very little can be said. There is a lot of good dancing, and there it ends.

The show is most pretentious. It sets out to be a big time musical comedy but it starts at the wrong end. It has acquired all the trappings in the line of numbers, clothes and settings, but has overlooked the fact that first of all a musical comedy should have music and not just tricky arrangements. The changes of costumes and scenes, however, are many and beautiful. In the African scene some authentic native motifs have been used to great advantage, and in the cabaret set the entrance is formed by the clever use of the two brown legs of a female Collussus.

But the chorus looks like the pickings of a pair of disgrunted old maids. One or two good looking girls who must have clipped in the back, can be discovered after diligent search, but "unpulchitude" is what the ladies of the ensemble have nothing else but. It is evident that an effort has been made to train them into resemblances of the famous Tiller girls and to get away from the abandon that was the charm of the brown chorine.

But although they have mastered the technique of clever routines there is still the overpowering desire on the part of a few to stand out as individuals, and in one instance they broke into so much audible chater that it sounded like the weekly meeting of a sewing circle.

After being dragged to Africa and back, one leaves the theater with the feeling that a lot of noise, a gang of people and bales of silk, have been hurled at one in quick succession. One recognizes that money and time have been spent lavishly to make much out of a little, and to lend artistic finish to what has no genuine appeal. A joke or two leaves a smile; a clever step faintly lingers. But not a single tune or strain of music remains. Not a beautiful face or figure clings. Not a vivid personality sticks. In spite of the many colorful sets and numerous changes, the endless rushing on and off of a large chorus, one is bored. One experiences the keen disappointment that comes after biting into a very elaborate and ornate confection and finding it full of air. "Rang Tang" has no filling.

Theatrical — 1927

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An An All Star Vaudeville Bill

- BIG ACTS -

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Why Florence Mills and her Blackbirds have conquered Europe.

Specially written for the West African Monthly Supplement

Courier Record 2-5-27

"What do you dance?" When a man belonging to one branch of the great Bantu division of mankind met a member of another, said Livingstone, that was the question he asked. What a man danced, that was his tribe, his social customs, his religion, for, as an anthropologist has expressed it, "a savage does not preach his religion, he dances it."

Nothing, seemingly, could be farther removed from a savage than that cultured and radiant little lady, Miss Florence Mills or any of her brother and sister artists whose amazing vitality in the entertainment known as "Black Birds" has taken London by storm; yet there is a fervour that has a religious quality in their work, and one may hazard the theory that this is no mere accident. A comparison with the art of painting may serve to clarify the idea. The futurists and the Impressionists and the Cubists deliberately discarded almost all that had been learnt through the centuries of the art of painting and by a return to the most primitive forms, the most crude methods, sought to infuse new life into a body that was becoming tired and decadent. The first result was to shock and even horrify the public; and in many cases, it is true, the exponents sought merely to conceal a lack of technical equipment by glaring eccentricities; such charlatans soon vanished from the scene. But the sincere artists worked steadily on, and, having started a revolution proceeded to build up a new state, utilising what was good in the old regime. So it is that many men who were regarded as revolutionaries twenty or thirty years ago, are today acknowledged as masters—Whistler, Rodin, Picasso, Gauguin, Van Gogh, Wyndham Lewis...one need not extend the list.

In a not dissimilar way the Black Birds, whether consciously or unconsciously, have shaken off all the old traditions of the dance and have gone back to the primitive peoples of Africa—the birthplace of dancing—in their endeavours to create an art that, superficially European as it may be in some aspects, is in its inspiration essentially African. They have recognised that dancing is a primary and essential art—the earliest of the arts that express themselves first in the human person—significance lies in the fact that it is an intimate concrete appeal of a general rhythm. The secret of the appeal of the Black Birds lies in the auto-intoxication that rapturous movement brings alike to spectators and devotees.

London has seen nothing to equal the dancing of the Black Birds and to appreciate that fact it is not sufficient to see them in their performance at the London Pavilion. Comparisons, however odious, are sometimes illuminating. When Mr. C. B. Cochran arranged a Charleston Ball at the Albert Hall not long ago dancers from all the London theatres and Cabarets came along to contest a Charleston competition. Thousands of spectators wildly cheered the "Lido Lady" girls and the Piccadilly girls and the rest of the teams who worked so frantically to win the prizes. After it was all judged and settled, the competitors squatted around the edge of the floor and the Black Birds came on the scene. Very wisely they had been regarded as *hors concours*, for their dancing made everything that had gone before seem like the feeble staggerings of debilitated baboons. They attain a perfection of ensemble such as has never been seen on the English stage. They work not as twenty or thirty individual dancers, not as principals supported by *corps de ballet*, but as one body animated in an ecstatic frenzy of rhythmic motion.

One must insist upon this aspect of the Black Birds' art, for it is chiefly on dancing that they depend and by which they succeed. Florence Mills has a sweet and flute-like voice; the Southern Trio bring back memories of those part-songs and plantation ditties that delighted our grandfathers in the days of the old Christy Minstrels; Lloyd Mitchell, U. S. Thompson, and Johnny Nit, the three "Pullman Porters" and Johnny Hudgins with his "silent songs" and his skating feet are humorists of remarkable wit; but the singing and the humour could be equalled elsewhere; no other band of artists could hope to rival the dancing of this talented company. No such fresh and bracing

breeze has blown into the dancing world since the advent of the Imperial Russian Ballet in pre

The advent ... cannot fail to influence considerably the stage dancing of today. The danger is that success and tempting offers will split them asunder. Something of the kind has already happened in the case of the Russian Ballet: which had become westernised emasculated: the best dancers have drifted away, the old perfection of the *corps de ballet* is lacking, the former force and vitality has waned. The strength of the Black Birds lies in their team work and above all in its essential "Africanity." Whether their dancing be ecs or pantomimic it is the burning sands and the primeval swamps of Africa that it brings to mind, and never the dance halls of Paris or the Cabarets of New York. It is this native quality, this marvellous skill in imparting rhythm and measure to the most unlikely movements of the body, this vigorous whirlwind of sound enshrining dazzling images at works havoc with modern affectations and artificialities and takes us back to those primitive times and places where dancing was the natural outlet for the emotions, both religious and amatory, and ... sought to display all the force and energy the skill and ... the beauty and grace yearning within them to be poured into ... ream of the race's life.

STAR'S CAREER LIKE A PAGE FROM FICTION

Worked As Dining Car Steward Before Selection for Part

New York.—The career of Daniel L. Haynes, who stopped in at forty-eight hours notice and saved the performance o f"The Bottom of the Cup" when Charles S. Gilpin fell ill, reads like a page from one of the Alger novels. A native of Atlanta, Ga., he was the choir master of a small church in that State.

Last year Haynes decided to go North and so worked his way to New York as a steward on one of the trains. Once here he decided to take up the law as a career and so he enrolled in Columbia for a course. He stayed there for a few months only to find that the study of law was not for him.

Resumes Voice Culture

He then resumed his interrupted tuition in voice culture and continued at this for months. It was by sheer accident that he stumbled into the role of Charles Thompson in "The Bottom of the Cup." Gilpin had been ailing for quite a while and the Mayfair Productions found it advisable to reserve a Negro to go on in case Gilpin should be incapacitated. It so happened that one of the members of the cast suggested Daniel L. Haynes and the lad was sent for.

Role Like Messiah

The Mayfair Productions liked the lad and found the ethereal look in his eyes just right for the Messiah like role of Charles Thompson. Haynes, however, protested that he was unworthy of the role, but after many persistent attempts the Mayfair Producions got the lad to agree to go on in case of Gilpin's illness. Daniel L. Haynes then went home and thought no more about the matter until the day before the opening, when the phone in Hayne's apartment rang and he was informed that he was to play the lead in "The Bottom of the Cup" the next afternoon. In less than forty-eight hours time he memorized the role and stepped into the part on Monday afternoon, and the next morning awoke to find himself acclamied by the New York press as a new colored star. And so it is that Daniel L. Haynes, choirmaster and steward, now stands in the category with Paul Robeson and Charles S. Gilpin as one of the greatest of actors.

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Maceo Pinkard, Producer Of Club 7-11 Revue, Says Girls Should Not Pose For Nude Photos Without Artistic Background

Says Person Looking at Pictures Should Not Get Idea of Nudity.

NEW YORK, Jan. 13.—Maceo Pinkard, producer of the Club 7-11 Revue, Broadway and 57th street, song writer and theatrical expert, says: "From an artistic standpoint, I think nudity has its value. Insofar as commercialism is concerned, I don't think nudity should be exploited without artistic treatment. Girls should not pose for nude pictures without some kind of flowers, drapes, or other artistic decoration to offset the nude idea. When looking at a nude picture you shouldn't get the idea of nudity at all. It should be so well executed one would get the idea of art only. Plain nude pictures are repulsive."

Mr. Pinkard was born in Bluefield, W. Va., and has been a song writer for ten years. Some of his songs are "Drafting Blues," "Don't Cry, Little Girl," "Sweet Georgia Brown," "Sweet Man" "Give Me

MACEO PINKARD

a Little Kiss," etc. He has wr... material for such white celebrit... as Sophie Tucker, Ray Samuels and Belle Baker. He also wrote "Liza."

"BLACK BOTTOM" IS PUBLIC PROPERTY, FRENCH HEAD OF MUSIC PUBLISHERS RULES

Paris, Feb. 17.—"Black Bottom" is a generic term and,, therefore the property of no particular person according to a ruling made last week by Rene Demands President of the Music Publishers' Syndicate, acting as an arbiter in a case growing from a claim by M. Salabert sought to prevent anybody else in France from publishing a "Black Bottom."

In making his ruling M. Demands also declared that the terms "Charleston" and "Foxtrot" were public property."

BROWNSKIN GIRLS TO FEATURE IN NEW ZIEGFELD FOLLIES

Nothing but Browns, not high yellows or dark blues, ba... BROWNS are wanted by Florenz Ziegfeld, father of the Ziegfeld Follies, and originator of the glorification of the American girl idea.

A new sensation for the coming theatrical season is promised by Ziegfeld and it is rumored known his purpose on New York bill ... advertising for brownskin girls for his new Follies.

JOSEPHINE BAKER TO COME TO U. S.

'Folies Bergere" Scheduled to Open In New York With Entire Cast

PARIS. — New York is expected to see a star of color heading a big European revue for ... the first time in ... Josephine Baker and the "Folies Bergere" open in Manhattan the latter part of June.

The entire revue is scheduled to sail June 15, on the new steamer, Ile de Paris, which will make its maiden voyage at that time.

The revue will possibly draw scores of friends of ... Baker, who rose to stardom only after going abroad. Many members of the cast have never been in America.

'BLACKBIRD' DOING WELL IN LONDON

LONDON, Eng., June 16.—Sa... the 2nd edition of "Blackbirds" at the Pavilion the other night, thanks to the courtesy of Cyril Lawrence, Lew Leslie's genial general manager. Despite the prevailing impression, Cyril informs us that "Blackbirds" is not saying "Bye, bye" to London entirely, as the show, after finishing at the Pavilion, plays Golder's Green Hippodrome in the London suburbs for one week, and, with about ten new principals from America, re-opens at the Strand Theatre for another run. At the "Pav" the famous Plantation Orchestra starts proceedings, under the able direction of Will Vodery, with Johnny Dunn featured as the creator of the "Wa-Wa" effect and Pike Davis, first cornetist. It must warm the cockles of Geo. W. Meyer's heart to hear his melodies played with such verve, vim and virtuosity. The Prologue "Down South" opens with a "Mammie's Birthday," a full-stage scene depicting a huge head and shoulders of the traditional Mammy on the back cloth, with Edith Wilson crooning "Mammie," while the joyous Picks give vent to their feelings in song and dance. Miss Wilson invests this number with rare feeling and artistry, giving it a little touch of melancholy, which is the base of all those Southern "Blues" numbers.

I noticed Florence Mills from her very first number singing her songs without a trace of American accent, so completely has she become Europeanized during her long stay here. Needless to say, her every entrance was the signal for a burst of enthusiasm, so much of an idol has she become with the Londoners.

Johnny Hudgins "In Silence" throughout the show was one continuous roar of laughter. His pantomimic "songs" and dances were great fun. The best thing in the whole show was the skit "Who's On the Phone?," with Hudgins and Edith Wilson as the husband and wife in bed, whilst Edith carries on a long rambling conversation on the telephone with "Mose." Johnny's expressions during this interminable talk ran the entire gamut of human emotions. The audience were simply convulsed and at times the laughs were so loud it was impossible to hear what Edith was saying to the garrulous "Mose." To watch Johnny, "fed to the teeth," sink down on the pillow sick and tired of "Mose" and suddenly rise up, his interest quickened by Edith's amusement at what "Mose" had just said, together, grinned in harmony, finally letting himself go in silent hi-larity. He wasn't the only one. Everybody knew it wasn't Henry.

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Maceo Pinkard, Producer Of Club 7-11 Revue, Says Girls Should Not Pose For Nude Photos Without Artistic Background

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NEW YORK, Jan. 13.—Maceo Pinkard, producer of the Club 7-11 Revue, Broadway and 57th street, song writer and theatrical expert, says: "From an artistic standpoint, I think nudity has its value. Insofar as commercialism is concerned, I don't think nudity should be exploited without artistic treatment. Girls should not pose for nude pictures without some kind of flowers, drapes, or other artistic decoration to offset the nude idea. When looking at a nude picture you shouldn't get the idea of nudity at all. It should be so well executed one would get the idea of art only. Plain nude pictures are repulsive."

Mr. Pinkard was born in Bluefield, W. Va., and has been a song writer for ten years. Some of his songs are "Drafting Blues," "Don't Cry, Little Girl," "Sweet Georgia Brown," "Sweet Man," "Give Me a Little Kiss," etc. He has wr ... material for such white celebrit ... as Sophie Tucker, Ray Samuels and Belle Baker. He also wrote "Liza."

MACEO PINKARD

"BLACK BOTTOM" IS PUBLIC PROPERTY, FRENCH HEAD OF MUSIC PUBLISHERS RULES

Paris, Feb. 17.—"Black Bottom" is a generic term and,, therefore the property of no particular person according to a ruling made last week by Rene Demands President of the Music Publishers' Syndicate, acting as an arbiter in a case growing from a claim by M. Salabert sought to prevent anybody else in France from publishing a "Black Bottom."

In making his ruling M. Demands also declared that the terms "Charleston" and "Foxtrot" were public property."

BROWNSKIN GIRLS TO FEATURE IN NEW ZIEGFELD FOLLIES

Nothing but Browns, not high yellows or dark blues, but BROWNS are wanted by Florenz Ziegfeld, father of the Ziegfeld Follies, and originator of the glorification of the American girl idea.

A new sensation for the coming theatrical season is promised by Ziegfeld and it is rumored known his purpose on New York bill boards advertising for brownskin girls for his new Follies.

JOSEPHINE BAKER TO COME TO U. S.

'Folies Bergere" Scheduled to Open In New York With Entire Cast

PARIS. — New York is expected to see a star of color heading a big European revue for possibly the first time when Josephine Baker and the "Folies Bergere" open in Manhattan the latter part of June.

The entire revue is scheduled to sail June 15, on the new steamer, Ile de Paris, which will make its maiden voyage at that time.

The revue will possibly draw scores of friends of Miss Baker who rose to stardom only after going abroad. Many members of the cast have never been in America.

'BLACKBIRD' DOING WELL IN LONDON

LONDON, Eng., June 16.—Saw the 2nd edition of "Blackbirds" at the Pavilion the other night, thanks to the courtesy of Cyril Lawrence, Lew Leslie's genial general manager. Despite the prevailing impression, Gilpin suffers, that "Blackbirds" is not saying "Bye, bye" to London entirely, as the show, after finishing at the Pavilion, plays Golder's Green Hippodrome in the London suburbs for one week, and, with about ten new principals from America, re-opens at the Strand Theatre for another run. At the "Pav" the famous Plantation Orchestra starts proceedings, under the able direction of Will Vodery, with Johnny Dunn featured as the creator of the "Wa-Wa" effect and Pike Davis, first cornetist. It must warm the cockles of Geo. W. Meyer's heart to hear his melodies played with such verve, vim and virtuosity. The Prologue "Down South" opens with a "Mammie's Birthday," a full-stage scene depicting a huge head and shoulders of the traditional Mammy on the back cloth, with Edith Wilson crooning "Mammie," while the joyous Picks give vent to their feelings in song and dance. Miss Wilson invests this number with rare feeling and artistry, giving it a little touch of melancholy, which is the base of all those Southern "Blues" numbers.

I noticed Florence Mills from her very first number singing her songs without a trace of American accent, so completely has she become Europeanized during her long stay here. Needless to say, her every entrance was the signal for a burst of enthusiasm, so much of an idol has she become with the Londoners.

Johnny Hudgins "In Silence" throughout the show was one continuous roar of laughter. His pantomimic "songs" and dances were great fun. The best thing in the whole show was the skit "Who's On the Phone?," with Hudgins and Edith Wilson as the husband and wife in bed, whilst Edith carries on a long rambling conversation on the telephone with "Mose." Johnny's expressions during this interminable talk ran the entire gamut of human emotions. The audience were simply convulsed and at times the

up, his sent Edith into spasms of laughter, and suddenly rise up, s amuse- "Mose," had just said, together, grinned in harmony, finished by Edith's laughs were so loud it was impossible to hear what Edith was saying to the garrulous "Mose." To watch Johnny, "fed to the teeth," sink was too funny for words. down on the pillow sick and tired of "Mose" pulled a great joke which